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ABSTRACT

A planning committee of educators in Maine made three recommendations for extending educational opportunities below the baccalaureate level to more people: (1) the development of a comprehensive community college structure for the state; (2) the use of existing public and private facilities instead of constructing new buildings; and (3) the creation of a counseling center for each community college, using leased facilities near the center of the community. The model was tested in York County because of the low income level, the lack of any public postsecondary institution, and the availability of the facilities and services of two private colleges. To date, seven educational institutions are involved in the project. York County Community College Services began classes on Sept. 5, 1973, with 38 courses and 315 students. In its second semester, enrollment is nearly double, at a cost to the state significantly lower than that of existing publicly supported campuses. Student surveys indicate that 90 percent of the students are attending college for the first time and that they would not be attending except for the college's proximity and low cost. A second phase now being developed in an open-entry, open-exit instructional system. (KM)

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A Cooperative Approach to Post-Secondary Education in Maine:

YORK COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICES

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A COOPERATIVE APPROACH IN MAINE

George P. Connick

Imagine, if you will, a state with a population of a little over one million people, which is as large as the combined geographic area of the other five New England states, has some of the most diverse and strikingly beautiful scenery in the country, and four distinct seasons, highlighted by warm summers and cold snowy winters.

Imagine, further, a people whose average family income ranks them 37th in the nation. In terms of postsecondary education, Maine ranks last in the nation in the percent of high school seniors who continue their schooling (45 percent go on). Maine has a university system with eight campuses (consisting of two university centers, four state colleges, and two community colleges) with a total enrollment of 25,000 students. There are six vocational-technical centers directed by the State Department of Education, with a combined enrollment of 2,500, and there are nineteen proprietary schools and fifteen private colleges. Six of Maine's sixteen counties have a university campus, six have a vocational-technical institute, and ten counties have neither. The most southerly county is York, with a population of 106,000 and no public postsecondary institution.

The York County town of Sanford, population 16,000, is a typical Maine town. Sanford has twelve churches, thirteen bars, twelve restaurants, an active adult education program, a public library with 72,000 volumes, a small hospital, and one private liberal arts college, Nasson, with approximately 900 students. The public postsecondary institutions closest to

Sanford--the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham and Southern Maine Vocational-Technical Institute--are 40 miles away. Sanford, like the great majority of small communities in Maine, has insufficient population to justify the state investing in the construction of a community college or other type of postsecondary institution. Yet there are certainly enough people of all ages who want and need postsecondary opportunities to warrant the state providing them in some way.

Faculty and administrators in higher education are undergoing, often reluctantly, a gradual transformation of their views about higher education and of the place of their own institution in that transformation. New life styles and changing student career preferences, new priorities for public and private dollars and the resulting contraction of educational budgets have forced us to reassess what we are about. And what we are about, of course, is a transition, even though we may disagree on where we have been, on where we want to go and, perhaps more importantly, on the details for getting there. Harry Truman once said that "getting people to do something often requires flattering, kissing, and kicking them to do the things they should have done in the first place." Maine, like other states, has been attempting to deal with both the theory of transition and the process for achieving it--the flattering, kissing, and kicking.

In the past eight years, ten major studies dealing with postsecondary education in Maine have urged that educational access be expanded to the largely bypassed portion of the state's population. Confronted in the late '60s and early '70s with the same financial difficulties plaguing other states, Maine found it difficult to implement more than a handful of the recommendations in these studies. Believing that educational expansion needed to be carefully

coordinated in the future, the chancellor of the University of Maine and the commissioner of education, in December 1972, invited the presidents of the four private colleges in southern Maine to discuss how less-than-baccalaureate opportunities might be extended to more people. A planning committee was formed, headed by the director of academic planning and two faculty from the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham, with representatives from Southern Maine Vocational-Technical Institute, and four private colleges--Westbrook, St. Francis, St. Joseph's and Nasson.

After careful study, the committee identified four problems as being paramount in restricting access to postsecondary education in Maine. First, the existing 14 public and 15 private colleges are primarily baccalaureate-granting institutions although the job opportunities in Maine tend to be 8 times greater for associate degree graduates. Second, the state cannot afford to construct and maintain additional campuses, especially in sparsely populated sections of the state. Third, a sizeable number of Maine citizens of all ages live too far from the existing campuses to make commuting realistic during the severe Maine winters. And fourth, those citizens living beyond commuting distance to a campus tend to have the lowest family incomes and, therefore, because of the expense for resident students, are least likely to be able to send their children away to school or to attend themselves.

The committee's final plan offered solutions to these four problems. First, a community college structure was proposed that would offer comprehensive occupational, technical, and liberal arts programs, and other services to meet the economic and cultural needs of each region of the state. Second, the plan provided that the state should utilize existing public and private educational institutions and facilities, such as public libraries, armories, museums,

historical societies, community centers, and hospitals, rather than construct any new buildings. A third recommendation was that the heart of the community college in each locale should be a counseling center, using leased facilities in a location near the center of a community, which would make it convenient and inexpensive for the citizens to take advantage of the services.

The plan was approved by the chancellor of the University of Maine, the commissioner of educational and cultural services, who is responsible for the vocational-technical institutes, and the four private college presidents on July 5, 1973, and the decision was made to test the model in York County, the most southerly and oldest of Maine's sixteen counties.

York County, known as the "Gateway to Maine," is wonderfully picturesque, being rich with historic landmarks, forts, lighthouses, museums, and fine old homes. York is the ninth largest county in Maine, encompassing an area of 1,000 square miles. It ranks third in population and is the fastest growing county in the state. York was the only county in Maine in which all cities or towns registered population increases from 1960 to 1970. The coastal towns of the area have relatively small year-round populations, but during the summer months the people who seek to escape the noise, dirt, and confusion of city life often increase the numbers five to ten-fold.

But life in York County is difficult for many families. The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that a family of four needed a 1970 income of about $11,230 to have an intermediate standard of living in southern Maine. This budget provides enough to maintain health and well-being, allows a degree of discretionary spending on food, housing and clothes, and allows a mere $690 per year for such things as gifts, contributions, entertainment, and education. In York County, 71 percent of the families have incomes below this standard. Furthermore, York is the state's most heavily

populated county without a publicly-supported postsecondary institution, although it has two private colleges, St. Francis and Nasson.

York was chosen as the ideal place to test the model because the low-income level of its residents restricts access to postsecondary education, because the county lacks any public postsecondary institution, and because the two private colleges, St. Francis and Nasson, are located in the two largest towns in York County--Biddeford and Sanford--and they were willing to lease facilities and services for late afternoon and evening classes. Also, because St. Francis and Nasson are twenty miles apart in the center of York County, over 60 percent of the county's population would be within ten miles of one of these new community learning centers.

This new model, named York County Community College Services, is a unique institution. To date, seven educational institutions are involved in the project. The University of Maine at Portland-Gorham and the University of Maine at Augusta have extended their programs in Liberal Arts, General Studies, and Business Administration to York County, and Southern Maine Vocational-Technical Institute has extended programs in Building Construction, Emergency Medical Technology, and Law Enforcement. In addition, the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham and Southern Maine Vocational-Technical Institute have developed a joint Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Management program which is being offered through York County Community College Services. Space for classes has been provided by the Sanford and Biddeford public schools, and through lease arrangements, Nasson and St. Francis colleges have provided classrooms, laboratories, faculty offices and essential library and bookstore support.

Within eight weeks of the July 5th meeting, a host of administrative details

were completed. These included the hiring of counseling staff and faculty, the opening of counseling offices, the releasing of publicity, and the negotiation of leases. York County Community College Services began classes on September 5th with 38 courses and 315 students. Now, in the second semester, enrollment is nearly double that of the fall and at a cost to the state significantly lower than that of the existing publicly-supported campuses. Of greatest significance, perhaps, are the student survey results which indicate that almost 90 percent of the students are attending college for the first time and that they would not be attending college at all if it had not been made available close to home at low cost.

Now that the initial aspect of the model has been successfully launched, the second phase is being planned. Still in the development stage is an instructional system which will be open-entry, open-exit. The system will utilize diagnostic methods to assist in prescribing individualized learning sequences and will allow students to work at their own pace on a competency-based curriculum. The use of instructional technology--films, audio- and video-tapes, slides, and computers--is expected to reduce the costs of instruction further when the model is expanded and used by large numbers of students.

The model being tested in York County has shown that comprehensive, postsecondary education can be provided for citizens (1) in a variety of degree programs, (2) within a reasonable commuting distance, (3) at relatively low cost for the individual and the state, and (4) without construction of new buildings or campuses. The model owes its success to the cooperative efforts of a number of institutions. The original goal of this project was to demonstrate that postsecondary education could be provided to those citizens, who, for whatever reasons, were unable to take advantage of the existing educational

system. Although still new, the York County model appears to be working. And what works in York County may work in Maine.

Or any other state for that matter.

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